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ABSTRACT

Since World War II the peoples of the Pacific Islands have changed rapidly from primitive isolated groups to social units that are in touch with the rest of the world. Because these changes have occurred within a short span of time, the island people, particularly the Manus, have provided the following anthropological data: a civilization can determine the direction that change will take; related elements must be changed simultaneously to assure the proper adjustment throughout the culture; change within the social organization precedes technological change; and planned change requires a model society for its foundation. For the technologically oriented systems of Russia and the United States, both seeking to impose their values on the world, the Pacific Islands offer small ecological models for the future that underline the importance of diversity, the dangers of uniformity and of assuming a model totally without discretion, and the possibility of economic blackmail if one culture controls an essential commodity. Even worldwide communication can permit the diversity of small groups and small languages if only the things that life, death, and communication depend upon are made uniform. (MAI)

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NEW LIVES TO OLD: THE EFFECTS OF NEW COMMUNICATION ON OLD CULTURES IN THE PACIFIC

MARGARET MEAD

April 1976

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Her research and writings have contributed greatly to what we know about childhood and adolescence in several cultures, the ascription of sex roles and the cultural values of those roles, and the history of specific cultures and people.

Her work includes : Coming of Age in Samoa, Male and Female, Growing Up in New Guinea, New Lives for Old, and other contributions too numerous to list.

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My topic tonight is what the Pacific Islands, and the Peoples of the Pacific Islands--and the continent of Australia is now included--what all the people of these various detached land masses in the Pacific can contribute to the rest of the world.

If we had looked at the Pacific fifty years ago, we would have talked primarily about what the rest of the world could learn from studies conducted in the Pacific with the strong certainty that most of those studies would be made by "Westerners" as we used to call them.*

Fifty years ago the assumption would have been that either Euro-Americans or members of other groups who had been educated solely within that tradition would be the people who would be making the studies and contributions. However, from the very start in the Pacific, very important contributions to the history of the Pacific have been made by people who lived there. So we have Maori historians and we had Hawaiian historians and so forth. However, they were making their contributions within the framework of analysis and science that had been developed in the "West." (I suppose it's all right to say West this evening here because, after all, we're talking about East and West, so I'll take a liberty I usually do not take and use the "West" out of courtesy.)

We knew perfectly well, of course, that no matter how different the technological levels of societies were, that it was perfectly possible to take an individual child from any society about which we knew anything and rear it as a Frenchman or a German or an Englishman or an American; if it had been dumb to start with, of course it would be a dumb Englishman or Frenchman or German or American. If it were bright, it would remain bright if it were brought up young enough, and would make a contribution, but it would not be making that contribution from the culture it had totally left. And if, of course, the rest of the world was prepared to attribute something to its physique, and the rest of the world has persistently insisted that

*Nobody has ever discovered "west" of what, and this always worries me a little about the East-West Center's name. It is an old habit to talk about the "West" and the "Orient" and the "East" and the "Middle East." The Air Force announced about twenty years ago, when they were beginning the space race, that they were going to have to remap the moon because the astronomers who had mapped it originally did not think we were ever actually going to land there and so they had mapped it as a mirror image. "And," said the Air Force spokesman in making the announcement, "when Americans arrive on the moon they will expect East and West to be in the right places." This is, roughly speaking, what we try to do when we talk about East and West.

Polynesians were the most beautiful people in the world, then of course it would be to its advantage to have a physique that other people noticed, but it would have become a member of the culture in which it was brought up.

We also knew that if people migrated in groups from other countries to the United States, which was the principal country we were considering then in studying immigration, that the less they brought with them the faster they became Americans. If they brought nothing but petticoats, the petticoats wore out and they were very quickly eating American food and sitting on American chairs and living like Americans. The second generation became, in a sense, more American in some ways than old Americans who had become rooted somewhere in Appalachia or Vermont. What we did not know much about was what happened to groups of people who stayed where they were and changed rapidly, taking on parts of the modern world. We know of course the way in which technology spread around the world, but we had not any very serious studies of how fast people could change if they stayed where they were. We've emphasized either stable Maori culture in New Zealand or stable Hawaiian culture in Hawaii or how they picked up as groups and went somewhere else. A great many of the most important additions to our knowledge that have come since World War II have come from New Guinea where the technological gap was the greatest that we have ever looked at before. The civilizations represented there were the most technologically advanced people the world has ever seen, and some of the peoples in remote parts of New Guinea were some of the least advanced in the world. It was the widest gap the world has ever seen, and we will presumably never see anything as wide again.

If the East-West Communication Institute has its way, communication will go on and on and on around the world and we will never again see the spectacle of people moving from the Stone Age into the Electronic Age in one generation without being removed from their own habitat. We have people in New Guinea now who lived in their own villages in remote areas of New Guinea until they were twelve, or thirteen, or fourteen years old before they went away to school and ended up studying general systems theory or constitutional law or modern economics. We have had children who write essays in which occasionally something turns up like, "My father was a cannibal; I'm going to be a doctor." Thus, we have had an opportunity since World War II to see how extraordinarily fast a group of people could change, in situ, in contradistinction to the way an individual who is transplanted can move. We know now that people can stay in their own habitat, on their own islands and in their own valleys, as small children, and grow up there and still be able to master within--not even a lifetime, but within eight or ten years--some of the more complicated parts of our most complicated culture.

We have been able to demonstrate, in a more striking way than we have ever been able before, how incredibly rapidly people can learn and how very rapidly groups can change. We have been able to add a few principles to what we knew before.

I studied a small group on the South coast of Manus Island, and I have been back periodically to the Manus of the Admiralty Islands, whom I first studied in 1928. I have been able to see what has happened to the great grandchildren of some of the

old men, like the old blind war leader who was an old man, but not terribly old, and blind when I was there in 1928. His great-grandson is now a law student at the University of Papua New Guinea. I have been able to follow the changes that have happened there, and they are more striking and more complete than in most other places. All you need is one example of what a group of people can do to realize that this is a possibility. Many people might not be able to do it, but nevertheless it is a possibility. The Manus simply moved themselves from a Stone Age culture into the present. They looked their culture over. They inventoried it. They thought about it. They decided what they would keep and what they would discard, and they were extremely sophisticated; they did not throw away their old economic technology. They said, "What we have to do is to change our social organization first. Meanwhile, we have to eat, so we will continue to fish in the same old way with the same old nets while we're busy learning Robert's Rule of Order"-- which they did. This is far more sophisticated than many people who have instead wanted to change their technological base before they changed the social organization in ways that would make the new technology possible.

At the end of the Manus study--I've been joined through the years by Ted Schwartz, Lenora Forstel, Lola Ross, Barbara Heath, and Laurence Malcolm, in addition to Reo Fortune with whom I worked on my first trip--we are able to say that if you have a group of people who are initially receptive to new ideas as most sea-going people are, and if they are able to take their fate in their own hands and change all at once and very rapidly in the direction they want to go, they can do this with great success. One of the things that is most disastrous about social change is changing a few things and not changing the other things that need to be changed with them. There is quite a good analogy in how we treat a sprained ankle. If you sprain your ankle, the thing that does the harm is your trying to walk so it does not hurt; but if you shoot a local anesthetic into the sprained ankle it gets well almost at once. It is the adjustment that does the harm and not the original injury. Most of the disorganization that has happened around the world has been due to the discrepencies, the disparities in change, the things that did not get changed together. For example, take the people who got cloth but did not get soap. If you are going to have cloth, you have got to get soap or you end up dirty! And there are people who got cloth but no soap or no needles or thread; they ended up ragged and dirty. And if you're going to have cloth you not only need soap and needles and thread, but you need a pocket handkerchief. If you do not have one the consequences are not good.

In most of the world, when we have had a technologically more advanced society contacting a technologically less advanced one, pieces of the outside culture were acquired but not necessarily the pieces that went together. We are now able to look at how this works in different parts of the world and say that if you are going to make a change, then make it fast and make it complete on all those things that have to go together. Don't introduce wages to part of the society without introducing a bank; if you do, relatives will take all the money away from the wage earners very fast. When there was no money they could not take it away. People go on very comfortably in large Polynesian households because when somebody asked you for bark cloth you asked them for coconuts in return. But when a few people

are employed for money and the rest are not, unless you have some place to put that money away where relatives cannot get it, you produce a new unworkable kind of society, a society that is parasitical in many ways.

You have to look at any culture as a system and say that if you change A, then you have to change B, C, and D also, or you are going to be worse off than you were before. This is what the Manus were able to do for themselves. They realized that if they made one change, they needed to make others.

Anthropologists were also better able to discuss what it meant to have the model of another society to go by, and they realized that what the Manus' model had was an American ideal based on their wartime experience of the American forces. They did not have real American society to copy, but they had a notion of what they thought American society was like. They thought America was a society where people did not care at all for material things, and where every human life was more important than any amount of property. They deduced this by watching the effort that was put into the base in Manus to reconstruct a wounded man. You may have seen estimates of how much the American military spends to train a single soldier so we always try to patch them up in the best possible style, but what the Manus saw was the tremendous amount of effort that went into this. And they saw the incredible generosity of Americans with Uncle Sam's property. Of course they did not realize that the generosity was most free-flowing because it was Uncle Sam's property, so they were again very impressed.

They also said that the reason Americans are so nonmaterialistic is because they have so many material things. This of course is also true. The fact that we are willing to waste on the scale that we do is very nonmaterialistic in one sense, if you consider the amount that we throw away, and the unnecessary energy we use, although if we just cut our energy use in half we would not have any problems with dependence on oil-rich nations. We are exceedingly careless of material things because we have so many of them. The Manus also thought that we took women and children seriously so all Manus women and children voted. They did not count the votes of children under 10 but over 10 they did, because they thought Americans believed that children were people. They had not discovered that we do not. We said we did, and they took us at our word. And we said we thought women were people, and they took us at our word again. So the Manus constructed a society based on the ideals which they derived from some of our spoken sentiments on the one hand, and some accidental acts on the other. Our extreme generosity was accidental, in a sense, although Americans are very generous; whenever they have something, they are willing to give part of it away. They will give away Uncle Sam's property, but they will not let Uncle Sam give away theirs, which is one of the complications of our generosity that we are seeing at present when we are grudging anything done for the Vietnamese by the government. Americans will vote against foreign aid which would have cost them an average of something like $4.50 per capita and instead go out and buy a $100 Care package. That part of Manus' perception of our generosity was quite right.

When anthropologists started looking at the way in which the Manus used American society as a model, we began to realize more acutely I think than any of

us had ever realized before, at least this is true of my perception, what it is like to build a society when you have no model. That is the position the world is in today. We have no models of how to build a planetary society; we have no models of how to build a society where the greatest dangers come from the air, and where the old frontiers are therefore meaningless; we have no models of what things you should do on a planetary scale and what things you should do on a continental scale, or on the state or city scale, or what should be the relationship between small units in the world we live in today, where you have world-wide communication and open skies through which every kind of danger can pass and no protection against it.

As we looked to people like the Manus who were remodeling their society on their assumed model of ours, I began to realize what we will be up against in the future and why we had the generation gap of the mid-1960s. This gap occurred when the first generation of young people who had grown up since World War II, since television and space exploration and computers and the bomb, got to college and realized that they lived in a world that was totally different from the world that their elders had grown up in. For the first time we saw young people who had no models--they would never be the people their parents and teachers were. For the first time in human history all the older people had to look at all the young ones and realize that they were not their successors as they had been in the past. There would never be young people that were just like them. The world had lived for at least 50,000 years on the delightful hope that children would be just like their elders and that made their elders happy to work very hard, sacrifice for them, fight for them, and feed them so they would have lovely little replicas later. We have never before developed a society in which people were willing to bring up young people who were not going to be like their elders in any way.

So we faced the generation gap. Of course the generation gap is still with us. It is not at 18 any longer, it is now around 27, but the gap will be there until all the people on my side of the gap are dead. We will finally be pushed off the other end and there won't be any gap anymore. People ask if we can bridge it, if it is shrinking, or getting more narrow. That is like asking whether the Grand Canyon is getting narrower. No, but new methods of communication enable us to talk across the Grand Canyon, and the new methods allow communication between the pre-World War II people who grew up in one world and the young people who grew up in a different one. Of course we can talk across the gap; we can learn to if we know what both sides are like. Looking at the extraordinary changes in New Guinea was one of the ways in which I came to understand this, and came to realize what it was like to grow up in a society where you could see three generations sitting together and where the children knew what the end of life was like from the beginning and that they simply had to grow into it. In societies like Hawaii, for instance, or California, the children of the immigrants took their cues from the children of the people who had arrived earlier and a peer culture grew. I began to see what it must be like when the break between parents and children included ten thousand years of technological change as it does in some parts of New Guinea.

For the first 20 years after the end of World War II, the whole world was enamored with uniformity, with spreading all over the world and into its most remote parts our particular style of doing things which we thought was exceptionally good.

We regarded ourselves highly--the top representatives of the highest civilization that had ever existed--an old Anglo-Saxon habit, and this point of view was shared by the rest of the people of the world. I think it is very important to emphasize this because today many people are very likely to deny it and announce that everything was forced on them, that the missionaries caught them in the bush and dressed them up, which is rubbish. They saw all those lovely corsets and clothes and they wanted them. No one ever forced somebody who was cutting down a tree with a stone ax to use a steel one. Nobody in his senses would cut down a tree with a stone ax if he had a steel one, unless he was enacting some ancient priestly rite.

There was a great deal of cooperation in this effort to spread our marvelous system around the world. We Americans thought it was our system; the Russians thought it was theirs. Technologically there was not much difference. We both believed in public health. When I say both here I mean on the one hand the so-called capitalist or free enterprise high civilization and on the other hand the so-called socialist or Communist high civilization. We both believed that how long an individual lived and kept his teeth was important. Whether you call that attitude Protestant or Communist, it does not matter--we shared it. We both believed that science-based high technology was the answer. The Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, Holland--all were developing the same pattern of education around the world--the whole system of schooling in which schools are arranged on the ladder system and anybody who stops before he gets to the top was said to have dropped out, fallen off, or failed. The point of schooling was to get to the top.

It was felt that if enough industry were brought to the cities, neglecting the rural areas completely, there would be enough employment so everybody would run away to the cities and we would have enough people to work in the factories that were being introduced. This has been the story of industrialization everywhere in the world. The new countries wanted all these things and the old countries obliged them, some out of altruism, and some because it was a good way to sell things or a good way to get more raw materials. The fact is that everybody thought that this was the answer, and thus for almost 20 years we believed that if we exported from these countries that were technologically advanced, their methods of doing things, everybody would be healthy, wealthy, and wise right around the world. It was not until about 1970 that people began counting their resources carefully and began to see that these resources would not go around and that even we ourselves could not continue wasting materials the way we were.

It really was not until the spring of 1972 that people took a long look at the energy involved in making synthetics. Up to then they had said, "Well, if the people who have the rubber run its price up too far we'll just make synthetic rubber. If the people who have the wool establish a wool cartel, we'll make synthetic wool. If the people who have the coffee form a coffee cartel, we can make synthetic coffee that does not have any coffee in it. We can make synthetic anything." The only trouble was, and nobody had recognized it at that point, that it requires tremendous amounts of energy to produce synthetics. When you are short of energy that is

non-polluting and you use a lot of the available energy to make large quantities of an imitation of something, you are going to contaminate the atmosphere enough to destroy even the country that produced the original product. And of course, the recognition of the population explosion came very slowly, too. It has only been in the last five years that we have come to a full recognition that the pattern of technological uniformity we were spreading around the world did not make sense.

We made some other discoveries at the same time. The "ideal" in agriculture to that point had been to take people who had these small plots of ground and whose gardens looked like a patch of weeds, and clear everything up, join the plots together into big units, bring in the tractor, plow the ground up and plant one crop for all of the people. We have just begun to realize that in the real tropics this does not work; that the "patch of weeds" had some grain that withstood drought, and some that withstood floods and some that prospered on an ordinary amount of water and they all were planted together in the little garden so that people guaranteed themselves something to eat. Instead, they were given a crop that went completely under when the weather varied; this makes a kind of figure of speech of what I was talking about. Whether the situation was agricultural or political, we began to realize that, just as in human biology or in any kind of biological life or biological system, you must have diversity. Too much homogeneity means death; heterogeneity and heterozygocity are extremely valuable. We began thinking that perhaps spreading these uniform systems all over the world was not the answer, and of course, this recognition exploded in all sorts of ways.

Whether we were talking about the educational system or the political system, we began to realize that parliamentary democracy was very hard to transplant, and what other people did with it was pretty peculiar. If you look at the "democracies" we have been defending recently, you can see this. Perhaps our system of government is not as transplantable as we thought it was, and of course, the Soviets have learned that also. The Chinese version of Marxist-Leninism is not very recognizable by the Soviet Union. Both the Soviets and the Americans were working on themes that would fix the world. As I said, the schemes were different in political bias, but not different technologically.

We have now begun to recognize the importance of diversity. I am emphasizing this because the Pacific is the most diverse area in the world. Both the enormous number and kinds of islands, high ones and low ones of all sorts and the fact that you could sail from one island and land in a group of other people somewhere else has produced a kind of diversity that you do not get on continents where people must move on foot slowly and thus become more alike as they go. It is when you can move around quickly and skip things that you get real diversity in the world. In fact, if you think about it, if we had not invented ships, we would have had no race problems; it takes people a long time to walk from Africa to Sweden. If they stopped and married on the way, it would have taken them centuries to migrate. It was due to these infernal ships that people could leap around the world and bring people that were very blond right up against people who were very dark, who were

impressed with the differences. In the Pacific everybody moved around on ships, and everybody came here on ships--except the Samoans!*

Of course, we do know that the people of the world did not originate in the Pacific Islands but came here on some kind of boat. The kind of boat is in dispute, but that the people came in boats is not.

We really have here the greatest diversity of ecological, cultural, and economic style that we have anywhere in the world. Furthermore, because these are island cultures, we actually have in them the closest thing to a model of the whole world--an island where the people do not know there are any other people. Easter Island was a pretty good model of planet earth. Easter Island people got there and they knew they could never get away. They were there for keeps as far as they knew, and there was no one else who was ever going to come, so they had to sit down and make what they could of the situation. We have now discovered that we are all alone in the solar system and no other people are going to come to our rescue; we must make do because nobody is going to help us. We can study and analyze the behavior of people on islands and their relationship to a known environment; we can understand an island because we can sail around it, fly over it, climb over it, and catalogue every tree and plant and insect.

Thus, we have in the Pacific small ecological models for our entire planet and we need people who can think about the whole planet. There are two great contributions to be made from Pacific Island studies: one is the island model of the planet, and two, the diversity of cultures in a period when we know we need that diversity, indeed that our safety depends on having enough different kinds of experiments going on. The need for diversity is as critical for social organizations as it is for plants and wildlife. The Pacific Islands can make those major contributions to our knowledge.

I could still be talking, however, as if this were 1925. I could still be talking about studies that were made by people trained inside American culture, or Japan,

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*There was a wonderful scene once in one of the oldest and most provincial villages in American Samoa--Fitiuta on Tau in the Manu'an Islands. Sir Peter Buck was a Maori who did not think very highly of the Samoan customs. The Polynesians are not noted for respecting other Polynesians as much as they might. He did not think too much of Samoan oratory because Samoans made speeches while sitting down, and of course the Maori's made them standing up, and that made a great difference. So there was a little contempt in his voice as he made a wonderful speech about the long voyages of the Polynesians across the Pacific and how they had landed on the different Pacific Islands. When he was finished speaking, one of the old Samoan chiefs said, "Very glad to hear what the eminent visitor had eminently said and undoubtedly it was true of his ancestors but our ancestors . . . originated in Fitiuta." Sir Peter Buck lost his temper and asked the Samoans if they were Christians and therefore believed the Bible and knew that the Garden of Eden was not in Samoa!

or inside the Soviet Union and the other Eastern Socialist countries, "Western" people who would come out and look at the islands, study them, learn a lot and go away. The difference today is that we are extending to people everywhere in the world the possibilities of sharing in the conceptualizations of modern science. It is now possible for the people who grow up in the Cook Islands, the Tuamotos and the Marshalls or the Gilberts, to make a contribution from their own society by using the common shared language of science. We now have many people growing up on their own islands who understand their own culture but also understand enough about modern science, whether it is botany, or anthropology, or geology, or marine zoology, to translate from what they themselves know into the common language that is being used around the world.

This is the situation to which the East-West Center contributes. By bringing 300 people here every year, you are bringing people who can go home again to share what they learned. The importance of diversity, the dangers of uniformity, the dangers of the model that was being set up, are being realized on both sides, as Europeans, and Japanese, and Americans are coming to see that spreading our ideas of schooling and having the whole world read Red Riding Hood and Dick and Jane is limiting, and not a good idea. The people who are on the receiving end of modern technology, whether it is India, or China, Burma, or Indonesia, are beginning to say, "We want to preserve something of our own way of life. We do not want to be carbon copies of the West. We don't want to have the same kind of culture. We want some of the things and we want to decide which, and we are not going to swallow all of it. We realize very acutely some of the defects of the culture that we have been copying so avidly." There was very little basis on which to choose between the missionaries of the past and the missionaries who dispensed modern technology, and the converts who were embracing it with enthusiasm.

The enthusiasm has died on both sides; this is what we are now going to be working on, probably for another ten years or so, and then we may have an attack of uniformity again. But, in the next 10-15 years we are going to be working hard to develop forms in which each culture can make its own unique contribution. We could still look at it as blackmail, because it is the great tendency today for a country to say, "What have I got that nobody else has and what can I charge for it?" We have cartels all over the world; people who have tin are getting together and blackmailing those without, and people who have oil, of course, have already gotten together; those who have bauxite are going to get together, those who can grow coffee are going to get together--there's a mood to turn the whole world into a bunch of blackmailers.

Well, mutual blackmail is an old New Guinea custom; it was a way they ran their economics on the whole, and it was one reason why the culture was rather backward technologically. They had money but they wouldn't use it because they found money didn't make people do things as fast as saying to them: "Hmmm, we have some nice pots here. Would you like them? Well, go and get some sego and we'll give you the pots." The other people would say: "But we have dog's teeth and you can buy sego with dog's teeth." "No, you go get the sego, and then you get the pots. If you don't, you don't get them." Everybody became extremely lazy in the

sense that they only worked when they were blackmailed by other people; a high division of labor developed so one group made pots, and another worked sego, and another grew yams, and another carved bedposts. Everybody blackmailed everybody else into making something and getting it done, including making money with a special shape. You might have a "female" shell used in trade; but the day you went out with it to buy a pig, the pig owner would say, "I don't want a female shell; I want a male shell; go find one."

We could turn the whole world into such a system; there are a lot of people in favor of it at present. Or we may be able to turn the whole world into something quite different, a world in which interdependence will mean people that give each other in trade of one sort or another the unique things they have, but who will be responsible for their own sustenance, for their own food, for their own essentials in life. This would be a very different state of things than what we have at present, where we are beginning to make great parts of the world totally dependent on food that comes from another place or materials that come from yet another. If we move in that direction people are going to ask what they can contribute and not how they can blackmail the rest of the world.

In the Pacific at present, we are probably fragmenting too much. It will probably be useful if all Polynesians discussed what Polynesians as a group can contribute to the world, and if a big group of islands in Micronesia could get together sufficiently to see what their contributions are. Certainly in New Guinea every little language group is not going to be able to run its culture in terms of its language; there are over 600 languages in Papua New Guinea. So what they are going to have to do is to say, "What do we have as Papua New Guineans that is different that we want to develop and want to work with." Regional cooperation is going to be very important, and not only on the Pacific, it is going to be important for small African countries, and for the Caribbean. But at the same time the diversity provided by islands is special, and this is the thing that can be developed in the Pacific.

If we want to think about the whole planet we are going to have to think about which things have to be planetary and which things ought to be left to very small units, and it is easier to do that when you are thinking about islands.

The communication system will have to be worldwide. It would be a very good idea if the style of electric light bulbs were worldwide and you didn't have to take transformers around the world to use electric equipment. It would be splendid if the life-belts on airplanes were identical. The things on which life and death and communication depend need to be uniform. We are going to have to develop worldwide things that run on the same voltage and that use the same signals to land at airports so that people can communicate. It will then be possible to save the small languages and small groups and to measure diversity. This is going to be one of the critical problems that we are going to have to solve in the coming years.